

Respect our Rights: **Partnership for Equality**



Report on the Dialogue  
with Refugee Women

Geneva Switzerland 20-22 June 2001

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# Respect Our Rights: Partnership for **Equality**

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## *Report on the Dialogue with Refugee Women*

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*Geneva, Switzerland 20-22 June 2001*

*“I am the one who feels the pain, I live the life, I go through the difficulties. Are you assuring me that you will implement the recommendations we are here to propose?”*

(Refugee woman, Nairobi, Kenya, 7-9 June 2001)


*“I believe that UNHCR would not have gone to this length to organize a meeting if it had no meaning. Thus, I believe that UNHCR will take action to the issues raised in accordance to its capacity and mandate”*

(Sela, Congolese refugee woman in Tanzania)

*“I truly believe that UNHCR will keep its commitments, especially when we had the honour to meet with the High Commissioner who in his speech promised to do his utmost to make this consultation successful and refugee involvement fruitful”*

(Muyssar, Palestinian refugee woman in Jordan)

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## *Acknowledgements*

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This conference could not have taken place without the many refugee women who participated and shared their experiences and wisdom with UNHCR, and offered us new solutions and ideas for moving forward, in partnership with them, to secure the equal rights of refugee women. We owe our first debt of gratitude to them.

This Dialogue would not have been possible without the help of the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children (WCRWC) who co-organized the event with UNHCR. We would especially like to thank Mary Diaz, Executive Director of WCRWC, for her valuable insights and continuous support of this project.

We would like to thank the Senior Managers of UNHCR, who came and listened to what the refugee women had to say and who committed to implementing change. We would also like to thank the donor governments who participated for their continued support: Britain, Canada, Denmark, European Commission, Finland, Ireland, Japan, Norway, South Africa, Sweden, and the United States. Our special thanks go to government representatives Haiko Alfeld, Louise Lavigne and Anne Marie Sloth-Carlsen for their valuable contributions on our panel discussions. We also wish to thank the UNHCR 50th Anniversary Foundation, the Ford Foundation, Mme Françoise Demole, and Nancy Rubin for their kind support.

Our thanks go to Erin K. Baines, PhD, for her excellent work in drafting this report and for successfully drawing together the rich discussions from all stages of the consultation process into a coherent narrative. We would also like to thank the facilitators who ensured that the working group sessions ran smoothly and the rapporteurs who ensured that the discussions and recommendations made by the women during the Geneva Dialogue were accurately recorded.

Finally, we hope that the lessons learned and recommendations for action put forth at the Geneva Dialogue will bring about some real improvement in UNHCR's approach to gender equality and also to the lives of the many millions of refugee women around the world.

## Foreword

# Respect our Rights: **Partnership for Equality**

In recent years, the international community has worked to develop stronger partnerships to find solutions to the problems of refugees around the world. Throughout early 2001, UNHCR responded to the call by refugee women to broaden this partnership and include their voices. An important part of that response was the consultations that were held with 500 refugee and displaced women, NGO and government partners around the world. The women spoke of the tragedies they have suffered, the difficulties of surviving in exile, the hopes they still carry and the courage and skills that have sustained them. These insights gave life to the discussions at the June 2001 Dialogue held in Geneva.

The energy of the group was clear from the first hour of the June Dialogue when Jima Nesredin, a young Ethiopian refugee from Nairobi, made her opening remarks. She was poised and confident as she stood at the podium, facing an audience that included the United Nations High Commissioner, Mr Ruud Lubbers, and many senior staff of the organisation. "I am so happy to be here with all of you. We are eager to start our meeting, which we hope will not just be talk. We need action."

In the days that followed, we heard from the women: heard the details of their lives and their work, and their suggestions for how UNHCR and partners could improve protection for refugee women and girls. The refugee women brought a rich range of experiences and backgrounds to the discussions. For example, the group included a lawyer from Azerbaijan who assisted fellow refugees who were forced to leave their homes. It also included a computer scientist from Afghanistan who runs her own aid agency, providing education to girls in Pakistani refugee camps. Another participant told her story of being kidnapped from her home in Sierra Leone at the age of 14 and held captive by rebels. These and other women came to the meeting to demand better protection for refugee women and girls and the resources for healing and rehabilitation.

All of the women had the opportunity to speak directly with UNHCR staff and management. UNHCR was represented at the highest level by the High Commissioner and Assistant High Commissioner. Directors of Bureaux and Departments also participated enthusiastically, during the meeting and by welcoming the women to their homes for more informal discussions. The women had a chance to question, encourage and recommend ways of moving forward.

The women drew energy and encouragement from this. Having learned to rebuild from next to nothing, UNHCR's commitments to them validated their experiences and gave them hope that some of their recommendations will be implemented. Upon her return from the meeting, Jima wrote: "I still can't believe I am at the university...Honestly, there is nothing I value more than my education! You know why, because then my future is in my hands. I have strong confidence that my education will make me somebody then I can extend my hand towards people who need my hand the way they extended theirs towards me when I most needed them."

We are pleased to have been partners in this valuable process. Our warm and effective collaboration is both a reflection of and a contribution to UNHCR's strengthened co-operation with NGOs and civil society. We believe that the Commitments made during the Dialogue by UNHCR's highest authority will lead to real improvements in the quality of displaced women's lives.



Mary Diaz  
Executive Director  
Women's Commission  
for Refugee Women and Children



Joyce Mends-Cole  
Senior Co-ordinator  
for Refugee Women and Gender Equality  
UNHCR



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*“I strongly believe that the meeting in Geneva was not a conclusion, but more the start of a new initiative”*

Marine, Armenian returnee woman participant.

*“You have started a social revolution”*

Ruud Lubbers, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, in an address to refugee women participating in the Dialogue for Refugee Women, Geneva, 21 June 2001.

*“We invite you to join us in this revolution”*

Joyce Mends-Cole, Senior Coordinator of Refugee Women and Gender Equality, in response to High Commissioner Lubbers, Geneva, 21 June 2001.

## ***Background***

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From the outset, the Dialogue with Refugee Women<sup>1</sup> was an ambitious undertaking<sup>2</sup>: to give refugee women a voice and help the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) take stock of the Office's commitments to, and remaining gaps in, promoting equal rights of refugee women and men. The response to this initiative was impressive. Over 500 refugee women, UNHCR staff, non-governmental organizations and host governments gathered in more than 20 local and regional consultations around the world, and between 20-22 June 2001, nearly 50 refugee women elected at these meetings travelled to Geneva, Switzerland for the culmination of this process: the Dialogue with Refugee Women.

The meetings were intense, productive, and participatory, and they were also groundbreaking. Never before has a series of consultations with refugees taken place on such a scale and it is to the credit of the Regional Gender Advisors, focal points, and other colleagues that they occurred in all regions and with such wide representation of refugee women. These local and regional consultations took place between March and June 2001 in a wide variety of locations, and they provided the groundwork for much of the discussions held in Geneva. The women used the opportunity fully to speak out about their situations and to formulate concrete recommendations for needed action. One important result of the Dialogue was that new networks were forged between refugee women, NGOs and UNHCR.

For the first two days of the Dialogue in Geneva, the refugee women met in small groups to share their experiences, to identify common needs and to prepare concrete suggestions for change. The meeting in Geneva culminated in a dialogue between women and Senior Management on the third day. Refugee Women stated their concerns and challenged UNHCR to implement their recommendations.

During the Dialogue, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Ruud Lubbers, called on Senior Management to lead the development of a new multi-sectoral strategy to promote equality between refugee women and men to be implemented by all UNHCR offices. All staff will be held accountable for its implementation. This forthcoming global and regional strategy will be based on the findings of this report of the Dialogue with Refugee Women, the recommendations within regional and local Consultation reports, and the Revised Guidelines on the Protection of Refugee Women, which are currently being finalised.

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'refugee women' refers to women and girls of different nationalities and age groups and living in different situations of displacement, including internally displaced, urban and rural, returnees and resettled refugees. The term 'refugee woman participant' refers to the diverse group of women who participated in regional and local consultations, and who were elected to represent their communities in the Dialogue with Refugee Women.

<sup>2</sup> This idea was first discussed between the Gender Unit and NGOs in the fall of 1999. Planning for the Geneva Dialogue was carried out in close consultation with the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children.

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## *Conclusions and Recommendations*

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The issues identified by the refugee women are mostly not new ones. Generally, they are the same issues identified in 1988 at the first International Consultation on Refugee Women.<sup>3</sup> This seems to indicate that while UNHCR has made substantial progress in developing policies, guidelines, and training, implementation of these policies remains uneven. In some areas, women felt that UNHCR is sensitive to their concerns and is working with them to improve the situation. In other areas, they expressed frustration that their voices are not being heard. Although this report focuses on the suggestions which refugee women made for improving UNHCR's response, it is important to emphasize that they also expressed appreciation for the organization's efforts and often an understanding of the constraints under which UNHCR operates. In addition, the women also highlighted the need for cooperation and partnerships between UNHCR and its implementing partners, NGOs, governments, and refugee communities.

### **Respect our Rights**

The protection needs of refugee women are many and urgent. Refugee women - whether in camps or rural settings, urban areas or as returnees - often do not feel safe. In addition to the insecurity which affects all refugees, such as the location of camps near borders, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) is widespread and refugee women lack adequate protection in most situations. Stigma and the generalized impunity of those who carry out the violence prevent women from speaking out.

Effective protection also depends on refugee women's ability to access asylum. Participants explained that, in many countries, refugee men continued to be viewed as the sole applicants in refugee status determination and registration, and as a result, refugee women have limited access to asylum procedures, even when they have legitimate claims of their own. Refugee women also reported that when documentation and ration cards have been issued, they were most often given to male heads of household. This can make women dependent on men for access to basic goods and services, and the lack of their individual identification increases the potential for exploitation of women. As a result, refugee women may also face undue restricted freedom of movement. Refugee women also discussed the particular experience of women in detention. In addition, effective protection depends on the quality of the asylum, including respect for social, economic and civil rights.

With respect to livelihoods, shortages of food and basic relief items, which are exacerbated by reductions in international assistance, increase the pressure for women to find supplemental sources of income. Refugee women recognized the efforts to provide income generation and skills development projects, but stressed the need to diversify these projects so that the women can learn non-traditional skills and engage in competitive markets. The importance of equal access to all levels of education was a recurring theme in many of the discussions. Finally, land and property rights continue to be a central concern of returnee and internally displaced women, as they directly affect their ability to become self-sufficient.

### **Partnerships for Equality**

Refugee women want to be full partners with UNHCR in making and implementing decisions which affect their lives and the lives of those in their community: they emphasized that they are already contributing to their communities through social, legal, economic, educational and human rights work. Refugee women reported that they are leaders in their communities and are increasingly demanding access to decision-making bodies such as

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<sup>3</sup> The first international consultation with refugee women, held in 1988, was organized by NGOs in Geneva, Switzerland.

refugee management committees, NGOs, UNHCR, governments and peace negotiations. Throughout the discussions, refugee women argued that in order to protect the rights of refugee women, men within refugee communities, governments and UNHCR must be actively engaged with the issue. They noted that they continue to encounter gender-related barriers including dependence on men and discriminatory attitudes, and that raising men's awareness of women's rights and increasing men's participation and accountability is a necessary component of any future strategy. Refugee women highlighted their need for more information about their rights as refugees and as women, and identified barriers to participation and influence in decision-making as rooted in both the public institutions that exclude them, and also in the home where they are responsible for childcare and domestic work.

The following box summarizes the principal recommendations formulated on the basis of the local and regional consultations and the working group and panel discussions held in Geneva. These, and the detailed recommendations (found throughout the report and in annexes C and D), provide a rich range of concrete suggestions for improving the protection of refugee women, ensuring their livelihoods, and increasing their participation in the decisions that affect their lives.

### **Recommendations to UNHCR from Refugee Women**

1. Develop comprehensive strategies involving men to address the widespread problem of sexual and gender-based violence, including domestic violence, and HIV/AIDS.
2. Increase advocacy by UNHCR and refugee women's organizations towards host governments regarding the quality of asylum, legal status and documentation, including personal identification to ensure freedom of movement and access to basic services. Strengthen monitoring of asylum procedures with a particular focus on their impact on women.
3. Continue to consult with refugee women at all levels and increase their participation in UNHCR decision-making in areas such as planning, program implementation, monitoring and evaluation.
4. Disseminate policies and guidelines more widely to refugee women, NGOs and host governments. Strengthen and develop new and existing mechanisms to ensure compliance.
5. Support education programs for women and girls. Diversify income-generation projects targeted at refugee women to promote the learning of new skills and the marketability of goods.
6. Increase advocacy with governments to ensure women's equal access to land through the adoption of gender sensitive property laws, especially in returnee areas.
7. Support refugee women to enable their effective organisation and participation in decision-making and leadership positions. Foster and develop partnerships between refugee women and UNHCR, and support the capacity building of women's organisations, associations and networks. Recognise this work as essential to strengthening protection of refugee women.
8. Engage men and strengthen their involvement in a partnership for equal rights of refugee women.
9. Support refugee women to become involved in and contribute to peace initiatives.

## *UNHCR Commitments*

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Following from the recommendations made by refugee women in Geneva, UNHCR's senior management made some concrete commitments to improve the protection and assistance provided to women in situations of displacement. Their initial commitments were:

### **Commitments to Refugee Women from UNHCR**

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1. Develop integrated country-level strategies to address violence against refugee women, including in situations of domestic violence. These strategies will be developed in coordination with security, legal, programme, community services and health sectors. In addition, partnerships will be developed with NGOs, governments, implementing partners and refugee communities to make these strategies more enduring.
2. Refugee women will be registered individually and delivered relevant documentation to ensure their individual security, freedom of movement and access to essential services. Refugee women and men will be enabled to participate equally in the registration process.
3. In all management committees and other representation of refugees to UNHCR in urban, rural and camp settings, including return areas, 50% of representatives will be women.
4. Refugee women's direct and indirect participation in the management of distribution processes for food and non-food items will ensure, to the extent possible, that these are distributed and controlled directly by adult female household members.
5. The provision of sanitary materials to all women and girls of concern should become a standardised practice in UNHCR assistance programs

These commitments are only the initial steps in the process, and more comprehensive measures are being developed to promote these and other activities to advance the rights of refugee women. The implementation of these commitments will be measured by World Refugee Day in June 2002.





# Introduction

*“We ask you to respect our rights as women, as refugees and as human beings. For this, I ask you to think of that face, think of that refugee, think of that human being on whose life you are deciding....People like me will be affected by what you do”*

(Aicha, refugee woman participant in a statement to the Global Consultation on International Protection, 28 June 2001)<sup>4</sup>

In an unprecedented global event, forty-seven refugee women<sup>5</sup> travelled to Geneva, Switzerland to identify and analyze issues of concern to them and, together with the senior management of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), to discuss the potential of new partnerships between refugees and UNHCR to promote gender equality. The Dialogue came on the heels of a significant number of local and regional consultations, where refugee women, NGOs, government officials and UNHCR staff gathered together in over 30 meetings.<sup>6</sup> Altogether, approximately 500 participants met to analyze the situation of refugee women and to exchange strategies to enhance their protection and livelihoods. Each local and regional consultation elected between 2-5 refugee women to represent their sisters in the Dialogue for Refugee Women held in Geneva from 20-22 June 2001.

In most instances, participants to the Dialogue travelled directly from refugee, internally displaced and returnee areas: in some cases, women temporarily left behind the difficulties of highly militarized zones and conditions of extreme poverty to speak on behalf of other refugee women and their communities. This gave the discussions a particular reality-based focus. As one refugee woman confided during the meetings, *“I cannot sleep at night, I keep thinking of the suffering of the women and children in the camp”*. The consultation process that culminated in the Dialogue indeed “shook up”<sup>7</sup> both UNHCR field officers and senior managers, reminding them of the “faces, the refugees, the human beings” on whose behalf they work.

## ***Purpose of the Dialogue with Refugee Women***

In 1988, the first international consultation with refugee women was organized by NGOs in Geneva, Switzerland. The recommendations of this consultation contributed to the appointment of the first UNHCR Senior Coordinator for Refugee Women, funded by Canada, and a call for specific guidelines on protection and assistance of refugee women. While UNHCR has devoted considerable energy and resources to addressing the needs of refugee women since then, the second international Dialogue with Refugee Women, provided an opportunity to consider remaining gaps in the implementation of UNHCR commitments to promote gender equality and to develop new strategies to move forward. The Dialogue also provided a space for refugee women to network with one another, NGOs and UNHCR.

## ***Purpose of this report***

The purpose of this report is to provide a comprehensive overview of the analysis made by participating refugee women in the Dialogue and in the local and regional consultations. This overview will be used by UNHCR headquarters and offices in the field to develop new strategies of action to promote gender equality.

<sup>4</sup> Aicha became the first refugee to address member states of the Executive Committee of the UNHCR.

<sup>5</sup> The Senior Coordinator for Refugee Women and Gender Equality, senior management and refugee women participants regretted that three of the elected refugee women in Cairo, Egypt, were not able to attend the Dialogue due to difficulties in obtaining their visas.

<sup>6</sup> See Annex A for a list of local and regional consultations.

<sup>7</sup> Reference used by Soren Jessen Petersen, Assistant High Commissioner to describe the impact of the Dialogue on senior managers in closing remarks, 22 June 2001.

Part I of the report, *Respect our Rights*, provides a synopsis of key issues of concern and suggestions by refugee women on 'what can be done' to address identified needs. These findings clearly illustrate a gap between UNHCR commitments to refugee women – based on the Policy on Refugee Women (1990) and the Guidelines on the Protection of Refugee Women (1991) – and the daily realities of refugee women's lives. The testimonies of refugee women suggest policy implementation remains a continuing challenge.

Part II of the report, *Building Partnerships for Equality*, identifies key challenges and opportunities in the development of future strategies to address the gap between policy and practice, refugee women identified four key areas for action: a) promotion of refugee women's participation, leadership and decision-making; b) increasing resources available to women; c) development of long-term and integrated approaches; and, d) enhancing men's participation in promoting gender equality. Within each section, sample recommendations of what can be done to address these issues are highlighted. These suggestions are not intended to be exhaustive, but merely reflect a small proportion of the many and varied recommendations made by the refugee women throughout this consultation process.

## *Proceedings of the Dialogue with Refugee Women*

The Dialogue provided a variety of forums in which refugee women participants could meet and work with each other as well as with NGOs and senior UNHCR managers. The first two days of the Dialogue were largely spent discussing specific issues in working groups in preparation for the meeting with UNHCR senior management which took place on the third day.<sup>8</sup> Three working groups of approximately 20 refugee women participants and NGOs were formed on the basis of the women's experiences in urban settings, camps and rural settings, and in return and reintegration.

The issues identified in local and regional consultations<sup>9</sup> served to frame the discussion of the two major themes in the Dialogue: safety and security, and livelihoods. UNHCR facilitators guided the discussion and simultaneous interpretation in 5 languages made it possible for women from different regions to communicate with each other. The working groups analyzed issues falling under the two themes, and then each of the three working groups elected at least two representatives to represent refugee women on panels with senior managers.<sup>10</sup>

In more informal ways, refugee women were able to network with each other and to lobby NGOs and UNHCR senior officials. In addition, two panel presentations brought together refugee women, NGOs and donors on the issues of 'building partnerships' and 'women as leaders for peace'. The refugee women also had lunch on the second day with Mr. Ruud Lubbers, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, and asked him questions based on their own experiences and those of the women they came to represent.

<sup>8</sup> The Directors of the departments of International Protection, Emergency and Security, and the Chief of the Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit and the Assistant High Commissioner participated in the discussions on the third day of the Dialogue.

<sup>9</sup> In local and regional consultations, refugee women selected issues for discussion in co-operation with field offices. A master list of issues was then compiled in Geneva based on local and regional reports. During the Dialogue, working groups of refugee women and some NGOs selected from the master list between 3-6 issues to be discussed over the course of the three days of meetings.

<sup>10</sup> The issues were discussed using the following framework: a) the barriers refugee women encounter, b) how these differ from barriers refugee men encounter, c) what refugee women and their communities can do to overcome these barriers, d) gaps in UNHCR support to the initiatives of refugee women and their communities, and e) what UNHCR must do to fill the gaps. The substance of these discussions can be found in Annex D.

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# Issues of Concern to Refugee **Women**

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This section of the report provides an overview of the main issues of concern raised by refugee women during the Dialogue and in local and regional consultations. The Consultation process was deliberately open-ended in nature to allow the refugee women themselves to determine the key issues. Over 30 issues were identified as particular concerns, which were grouped under the two broad themes of ‘safety and security’ and ‘livelihoods.’ Under each issue, suggestions on ‘what can be done’ by refugee women and UNHCR are included here as guidance in the development of future strategies by UNHCR.<sup>11</sup>

Many of the testimonies of refugee women remind UNHCR that a gap remains between policy and implementation, and that there is still much work to be done in order to protect refugee women as dictated by the organization’s mandate. In addition, the discussion revealed that the quality of asylum is as important to fulfilling refugee women’s protection needs as is their ability to access asylum. Finally, the relationship between safety and security and the ability of women to access gainful employment or sustainable livelihoods is also illustrated in this discussion.

## **Theme One: Safety and Security**

### *Right to Personal Safety and Security*

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#### **Sexual and gender based violence**

**Recognizes the need for concrete action to detect, deter and redress instances of sexual violence to effectively protect asylum seekers and refugees....**

UNHCR Executive Committee Conclusion No. 73 (XLIV) (1993)

Participants reported that sexual and gender based violence (SGBV) continues to be pervasive in situations of displacement. Refugee women from West Africa provided poignant testimonies of how rape and other forms of sexual violence are used as cruel means to bring children into the conflict:

*“My family and I were hiding in a room during an attack when a rebel broke in. My mother was asked to give one of her children up or else the entire family would be killed. My mother gave me up. The rebels took me with them, and on our way to their camp I was raped by seven of them. I was bleeding heavily and unable to walk any further. They threatened to kill me if I did not go with them. I was held by them for one year. After I escaped, I asked myself, ‘who will help me now?’”*

(Testimony of Marion, age 17, Sierra Leonean displaced woman, 25 June 2001)

In the discussions, refugee women emphasised that in all cultures, rape is a taboo that silences women. In some cultures, rape survivors are forced to marry the man who raped them, or, as Marion illustrates, face rejection: *“I became pregnant and decided to escape. Upon my arrival in Freetown...I was rejected by my community and family”*. Cultural and religious taboos that often force women to remain silent make it difficult to detect and

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<sup>11</sup> The report uses direct quotations as much as possible so that the story of forced displacement is told through the voices of refugee women. As the majority of workshop notes and regional and local consultation reports did not have page numbers, these were not provided. For the sake of brevity, recommendations cite only the country from which it was made, excluding dates.

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respond to SGBV. Participants stressed the need for confidentiality among case-workers, as well as avoiding situations where local staff may not have adequate training or may be too close to the community. At the same time, it was noted that expatriate staff must be sensitive to the cultural context in which they operate, and be must careful not to stigmatise or re-victimise survivors. The refugee women also expressed a preference for female staff.

Participants emphasized the importance of developing comprehensive programs for survivors of SGBV, including psycho-social counselling, health, legal counselling, basic assistance, empowerment and skills development or income generation alternatives. Preventing and responding to HIV/AIDS must also be an integral part of these programs. Refugee women also argued that an integrated approach to SGBV prevention and response is necessary, and that government institutions should be strengthened to address the problem.

*“There is no appropriate response from the government, the police or the judicial system”*

(Maria Teresa, Guatemalan returnee woman, 20 June 2001)

They added that new measures to sensitize men and communities on the issue of violence are needed. Specifically, men must be involved in the prevention of SGBV in their communities and perpetrators of violence must be prosecuted. In the plenary, one UNHCR senior manager, Janet Lim, argued that a greater effort must be made to utilize cross-sectoral approaches to the issue by UNHCR, host government, implementing partners, refugee communities.

### What can be done:

- Develop integrated approaches to SGBV prevention and response (Geneva)
- Incorporate training on women’s rights into trainings for public security forces and officials of prosecutor’s office or judicial ministries (Colombia)
- Organize workshops using role-play, drama and song to sensitize communities about sexual and gender based violence (Guinea)
- Adopt a code of conduct to guide interaction with young survivors of sexual violence. The code of conduct should require that interviews with these survivors be undertaken by trained staff, and should be followed up with counselling (Sierra Leone)
- Establish safe-houses for survivors of SGBV (Geneva)
- Support gender training, especially for men and youth (Geneva)
- Support the work of women’s organizations in assisting survivors of SGBV (Geneva)

## Domestic violence

*“One woman was not allowed out of her house for any reason, not even to fetch water for cooking or drinking. This task was usually performed by her son or other male relatives. One day when her son was sick and no other male relatives were around she decided to sneak out to fetch water. Unfortunately she ran into her husband on the way back from the water point and he said ‘Now I have seen you, so other men must have seen and tomorrow my name will be dust.’ He beat her with a stick. One of the women from the consultation saw this and quickly ran to the scene with a blanket. She covered the woman to stop her husband beating her and dressed the woman’s wounds because she knew she would not be able to leave the house to receive medical assistance.”<sup>12</sup>*

(Peshawar, Pakistan 10 May 2001)

Refugee women emphasised that domestic violence severely compromises the safety and security of women and children and reduces their ability to move freely, to access assistance and to participate in community activities. Unless domestic violence is addressed, the protection needs of refugee women will not be met. Domestic violence, which was defined broadly to include psychological as well as physical violence, is often intensified by displacement. Participants described how the trauma of being forced from their communities placed great strains on the family, which in turn often leads to domestic violence:

*“Men are often drunk and beat their wives and children as they ‘have not much to do’. Due to prevailing social norms, women feel they cannot protest against these behaviours. Almost all men are jealous and they want to control their wives, while they themselves have little respect for their wives such as having extra-marital affairs or ‘getting angry’ over small mistakes”*

(Mai La Camp, Thailand, 1 June 2001)

In return situations, the trauma experienced by male ex-combatants is often transferred onto the family as men take out frustration and anger on women. It was observed that when women are dependent upon men for providing for their families, they are often forced to stay with abusive husbands out of economic necessity or for the sake of their children. Participants thus drew a connection between the occurrence of domestic violence and the lack of economic alternatives for women and men in situations of displacement.

### What can be done:

- Provide a shelter for women and children survivors of domestic violence and sexual abuse (Pakistan)
- Develop and implement Guidelines on Domestic Violence (Geneva)
- Provide counselling on domestic violence to the whole family, including men (Geneva)
- Provide gender awareness training to both men and women related to domestic violence prevention (Angola)
- International actors must work with men to encourage respect for national and international laws protecting women’s human rights (Angola)

<sup>12</sup> Throughout this report, several quotations have been taken from the local and regional consultation reports. The full list of locations and dates of these consultations can be found in Annex A.

## *Right to Seek and Enjoy Asylum*

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### **Documentation and Freedom of Movement**

**Calls upon states and UNHCR to ensure the equal access of women and men to all forms of personal documentation relevant to all refugees' freedom of movement, welfare and civil status**

UNHCR Executive Committee Conclusion, No. 73 (XLIV)(1993)

**Issue individual identification and/or registration cards to all refugee women...**

UNHCR Executive Committee Conclusion, No. 64, (XLI) (1993)

**Ensure that refugee women have proper documentation and have access to whatever registration process is used to determine eligibility**

UNHCR Guidelines on the Protection of Refugee Women, (1991)

Participants of the Dialogue and the local and regional consultations identified the lack of personal documentation as a major problem facing displaced women. Even when such documentation is provided, the refugee women reported that it is usually only given to male heads of household. The distribution of food ration cards to men only is a continued practice, despite the fact that dependence on male family members often increases the protection problems women face. In the Pakistani regional consultation, UNHCR staff was informed of this problem, and its severe impact on the family, in a case where a ration card belonging to a deceased refugee man was recalled, leaving his remaining 4 widows and 25 children without access to food. Fortunately, refugee women eventually successfully lobbied to have the ration card reinstated to the widows. Also, in places such as Guinea, where individual ration cards were not provided, some refugee women and girls were forced to exchange sex for food. Most refugee women participants agreed that food would be distributed more evenly within families if ration cards were distributed to refugee women and they were equal partners in the development and implementation of food distribution strategies.

Refugee women participants acknowledged that lack of proper documentation restricts the freedom of movement of both refugee women and men. As one participant expressed, "it's like living in an open prison". However, refugee women pointed out that when host governments do extend documentation only to men, refugee women are further restricted in their freedom of movement. Without their own individual documents, refugee women are unable to decide independently when or if to travel. In addition, lack of individual documents may contribute to family separation, as women are unable to return to areas where their families remain. Refugee women reported that fear of being arrested by police and thrown in detention prevented them from moving about freely. This is especially a problem for refugee women living in urban areas, where they are often unable to perform daily tasks within a city such as going to the market or attending training and language sessions. In these areas, refugee women are even more likely to be isolated from each other, and often suffer psychologically from the enforced immobility.

In some host countries, cultural or religious traditions further restrict refugee women from moving about independently. The refugee women discussed the importance for communities to challenge traditional values preventing women from enjoying their basic human rights. Refugee women discussed at length the impact of negative public images of refugees on their safety and security in a host country. While negative and



discriminatory public perceptions towards refugees within host countries often leads to violence, refugee women felt even more exposed to abuse due to the perception that they are less threatening and more vulnerable than men.

*“Returnee women stated that they are more likely than men to be verbally abused in public places for reasons of ethnicity as they are perceived to be physically more vulnerable than men and are therefore easy targets”*

(Zagreb, Croatia, May 2001)

### What can be done:

- Advocate for personal documentation and registration among displaced persons, with special emphasis on women and girls as well as ethnic minorities (Colombia)
- Involve refugee women in monitoring registration processes (Georgia)
- Provide individual documentation for both men and women (Geneva)
- Increase campaigns to combat negative images of refugees (Geneva)

### Detention

Participants reported that both women and men in detention are often not informed of their rights as refugees and have no access to asylum procedures. Aicha, a refugee woman participant, described her experience while in detention, where she only learned of her right to have a pro bono lawyer five months after being detained. Lack of access to information increases refugee women’s insecurity. In some cases, women are detained for long periods in jails, together with criminals, or are placed in cramped detention centres where men and women are forced to live in close quarters. These conditions also have a tremendous impact on the psychological health of refugee women:

*“being mixed with criminals made me feel like a criminal...even though I was fighting for my life”*

(Aicha, refugee woman participant in a statement to Global Consultations on International Protection, Geneva 28 June 2001).

Another woman reported she was not able to sleep the entire time she was in detention, as culturally she had never been exposed to sleeping in a close quarters with men. Participants urged UNHCR to increase its monitoring of detention centres and to redouble its efforts to pressure states into finding alternatives to detention.

### What can be done:

- Advocate with governments to eliminate detention of refugees and asylum seekers (Geneva)
- Find alternatives to detention, such as shelters that keep families together (Geneva)
- Ensure women are never placed in situations, such as in close quarters with men, that compromise their safety (Geneva)

### Access to asylum procedures

When seeking asylum, participants reported that refugee women are often not aware of their right to file a claim separately from their husbands. Thus, even when they have an asylum claim of their own, their fate depends on the outcome of their husbands' claims. Also, refugee women argued that often judges or immigration officials lack awareness of the status of women within the culture from which female asylum seekers come, which impacts negatively on their ability to claim and be granted asylum. In the regional consultation in Montreal, Canada, refugee women spoke of the need to sensitize and inform male immigration officials, border guards, police and security officers about gender-related issues. Participants at the Montreal regional consultation described the "second trauma" of asylum procedures, where sensitive gender issues are often misunderstood, ignored and at times, ridiculed.

*"All the women gathered agreed that immigration judges are insensitive to asylum seekers, especially female applicants. Most adjudicators are uninformed about issues affecting women...[they] did not have much knowledge regarding the country of origin."*

(Montreal, Canada, 3 May 2001)

Refugee women stated that long processing times for asylum procedures increased psychological stress, and requested UNHCR to advocate with governments to shorten time periods. They also stated that decision-making of asylum cases must be made more transparent, so that refugees understand why their cases have been rejected or accepted.

### What can be done:

- Ensure that UNHCR Refugee Status Determination procedures and guidelines are gender sensitive and gender inclusive, to guarantee equal access and consideration of claims made by women asylum seekers (Kenya)
- Improve access of decision-makers and adjudicators to accurate, up-to-date and impartial country of origin information on the status of women and gender relations (Canada)
- UNHCR should advocate for training on cross-cultural sensitivity and interviewing skills, and female interpreters should be available (Canada)
- Female applicants should be informed of their right to make an application outside of their husbands claim, and should enjoy access to legal aid and counsel (Canada)

## *Right to Return to One's Country*

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**Calls upon States and UNHCR...to encourage the participation of refugee women as well as men in decisions relating to their voluntary repatriation or other durable solutions.**

UNHCR Executive Committee Conclusion No.73 (XLIV) (1993)

*“We interviewed 506 female teachers to see if they would return to Afghanistan to work. None wanted to go back. Is there anything there for us? For our girls? No, nothing”*

(Peshawar, Pakistan, 10 May 2001)

Refugee women participants argued that they must be involved in the process of consultation and decision-making about durable solutions, lest they be forced to follow their husbands or fathers against their will. In many instances, women said that they followed returning men, even when they didn't want to do so, because they were dependent on them. Likewise, refugee women who desire to keep their families united will often refuse resettlement when it is extended to them alone, because they fear they will not be reunified later.

*“...one Iraqi refugee woman...expressed that she was under a great deal of pressure, being the only supporter in her family due to the fact her parents are elderly...She feels highly anxious about the long processing time needed for Canada and the likelihood her whole family will be rejected in the end due to her brother's [disability]....She did not want to be separated from her family in resettlement (despite the fact that they make her case weaker) as she feels responsible to care for them....”*

(Amman, Jordan, 10 May 2001)

Participants perceived that UNHCR and host governments often favour return, rather than exploring other durable solutions in active consultation with refugee women and men. They strongly argued that one's option – return, resettlement or local integration – should not require refugee women to choose between their family and that option.

It must be recognized that the interests of refugee women and men, and elders and youth regarding return may diverge and as a result different alternatives for family members with different needs should be explored. In the case of long standing refugee situations, young refugee women participants emphasised that the desire of youth to return may be very different from that of their elders. For instance, many young Western Saharan women have been educated outside of the Tindouf refugee camps established in 1976. They do not see any future in returning to the camps and admit that they can only envision resettlement as a durable solution. Young Chechen refugee women raised similar concerns in the regional consultation in Jordan. Decisions about durable solutions must be based on an understanding of both inter-generational and gender differences, as well as the principle of family unity.

Refugee women participants also noted that peace is a necessary precondition to return. They stated that women are most often excluded from peace negotiations and decision-making, and their skills and interests are neither utilized nor recognized. Refugee women peace activists challenge this perception on a daily basis, and UNHCR has taken some good initiatives to support them.

Finally, refugee women participants emphasized the importance of fostering, upon return, the process of women's empowerment that often begins in exile. The experiences of returnee women in Guatemala and Sierra Leone demonstrated that gender equality rights realized in exile are often diminished upon return, where both returnee men and some women expect the women to return to their traditional roles.

### What can be done:

- Ensure that voluntary return is made on an individual basis, and that women are given the opportunity to make an informed decision (Geneva)
- Ensure that refugee women's voices are heard in peace negotiations (Geneva)
- Advocate equal rights for IDPs and ensure restoration of citizenship rights for returnees (Georgia)
- Develop long term women's empowerment strategies in partnership with development organizations that promote women's rights upon return (Geneva)
- Study country specific good practices and disseminate throughout all regions for replication (Kazakhstan)





## Theme Two: Livelihoods

### *Basic Needs and Access to Services*

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Protection cannot be seen in isolation from the mechanisms that are established to assist refugees...UNHCR has the responsibility, as part of its protection function, to ensure non-discriminatory access of all refugees to its assistance.

UNHCR Guidelines on the Protection of Refugee Women (1991)

**Consult with women regarding all decisions about food and other distribution.**

UNHCR Guidelines on the Protection of Refugee Women (1991)

### Camps and Rural Settings

*“Because of the domestic role that they play, women are the most affected by design of refugee camps. If a water point is put in the wrong place, or a distribution point is put in the wrong place, it is women who suffer from that”*

(Jeffery Crisp, Head of Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit, UNHCR, Geneva, 22 June 2001)

While there are UNHCR Guidelines on Refugee Women and Camp Lay-out and Design, and while these Guidelines stress the importance of consultation, refugee women provided evidence that they are still not being effectively implemented.<sup>13</sup> For instance, during the Consultation in Guinea it was found that:

*“women felt they were left out of planning, designing, implementing and even evaluating programs for refugee assistance. [Lack of consultation] was a major factor [contributing] to poor access to services like water, food distribution and shelter. Men were direct beneficiaries, since as family heads, they control the supply and distribution of the services to the family”*

(Guinea, 19 May 2001).

Lack of access to basic goods and services has serious protection consequences. For example, when women are not consulted in camp lay-out and the design and implementation of security measures, sexual and gender based violence often increases. In the case of shelter, lack of materials to close entranceways increased women’s risk of attack at night in camps in West Africa. According to participants from Sierra Leone living in Guinean camps, water points are often controlled by men and are major sources of conflict, frequently resulting in physical attacks on women and girls when they fetch water for their families.

All three working groups analyzed the reasons why a large percentage of assistance does not reach the hands of its intended beneficiaries. Women argued that paramilitaries, corrupt official bodies or refugee men themselves divert assistance for their own means. Women from all regions spoke first-hand of the difficulties they have faced when food aid is delivered through refugee committees or to male heads of household without their participation. With little influence in the home and public decision-making structures, women, and by extension, children are sometimes the last to benefit from assistance.

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<sup>13</sup> See Best Practices on Refugee Women and Camp Management (UNHCR, 1998). See also the Guidelines on the Protection of Refugee Women (UNHCR, 1991).

## Urban Settings

Although UNHCR Policy on Urban Refugees (1995) is based on the idea of self-reliance, the experiences of participants from Egypt, Russia, Yemen and South Africa indicate that many host governments systematically limit the ability of urban refugees to become self-reliant. Nevertheless, UNHCR provides minimal or no assistance to urban refugees. Moreover, even when UNHCR assistance is extended to urban refugees, it is restricted to the short-term. In the past, little if any support has been offered to refugee women as they seek to form associations in urban centres even though a recent UNHCR evaluation of urban refugees in Cairo found that such support is essential.<sup>14</sup> Without adequate means of supporting themselves, many urban refugee women and girls have no alternative but to turn to the informal economy. In too many cases, this means resorting to prostitution.

The findings of the regional consultations suggest that refugee women in different regions have differing levels of access to health care, including reproductive health care. Some of the major barriers preventing women from accessing male doctors and from practicing family planning are related to cultural or religious factors. In addition, HIV/AIDS prevention was considered a priority of participating refugee women.

### What can be done:

- Separate distribution points, for food and non-food items, according to gender and age in order to avoid congestion, and the exclusion or exploitation of women (Namibia)
- Employ female police in the camps, and especially at distribution sites where the shortage of materials can lead to violence (Pakistan)
- Advocate for and provide assistance to urban refugee women such as supporting their efforts to form associations and networks (Geneva)
- Train refugee women as health care providers (Geneva)
- Increase awareness-raising campaigns and trainings for refugee women, men and youth on reproductive health issues, including family planning (Geneva)
- Adopt a long-term planning approach, which incorporates measures to address psychological needs and to support family planning (Geneva)
- Provide training on HIV/AIDS and develop cross-sectoral preventative measures (Geneva)

<sup>14</sup>“...assisting refugee women engaged in rebuilding the future of their family must mean a level of engagement which goes way beyond providing the minimum level of support for the shortest possible time.” Stephan Sperl. June 2001. “Evaluation of UNHCR’s policy on refugees in urban areas: a case study review of Cairo.” EPAU/2001/07, UNHCR.

## *Right to Access Employment*

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Both refugee women and men encounter problems in obtaining work permits from host governments, yet the difficulties they face are different. According to participants, lack of individual work permits often forces refugee women and young girls to work in the informal economy which can lead to situations of exploitation involving sexual harassment and abuse. Refugee women have no legal recourse in such situations. For example, Jackie, a Liberian refugee woman living in Sierra Leone recalled in frustration a time when she was forced to leave her job because of sexual advances by her employers who took advantage of her undocumented status as a refugee. Lack of work permits also means that refugee women and girls must sometimes resort to prostitution. Immaculee, a Rwandan refugee participant described the situation of living in South Africa where refugees have no access to assistance, or work permits: “women will resort to anything – even prostitution – to feed their families; they are really traumatized.” The consultation in Georgia also noted that: “Unemployment is a primary reason for trafficking in women and prostitution” (Tbilisi, Georgia. 29-30 May 2001).

The difficulties faced by refugee women are also experienced by returning refugees and internally displaced women.

*“Access to formal and or ‘higher’ employment is more difficult for returnee women. With limited job opportunities, employers have a tendency to favour men over women as a ‘form of solidarity’, except for menial jobs that are perceived to be reserved for women. Women returnees suffer discrimination twice – first due to ethnicity, then because of their gender”*

(Zagreb, Croatia, May 2001)

*“Approximately one third of Angolan households are headed by women who bear the burden of generating income as well as...caring for their children. Internally displaced or refugee female-headed households have limited access to land, healthcare, education and other social services. The internally displaced or refugee girls face more difficulties because they have no competitive skills for the labour market and an increasing number of them opt for nocturnal lives on the streets of the city...The mothers and community condemn them...They have poor parents and seek means of livelihood by engaging in prostitution”*

(Luanda, Angola, 17 May 2001)

Refugee women participants emphasized the importance of promoting women’s economic empowerment – an area of work UNHCR has increasingly supported over the past decade. Yet as an Afghan refugee participant living in Pakistan argued, income generation projects and skills development must move beyond traditional areas of work for women. They should provide the appropriate skills to women or girls that are necessary for them to participate in and access new markets. Feasibility studies are particularly important to ensure that there will be markets for the goods produced and to ensure that income-generating projects are economically viable.



### What can be done:

- Advocate with host governments to recognize the right of both refugee women and men to work (Geneva)
- Expand and diversify skills-training opportunities offered to refugee and returnee women in order to ensure that they are provided with training that will enhance their competitiveness in a market economy (Sierra Leone)
- Support women to challenge stereotypes by taking training in male dominated areas such as carpentry, masonry and mechanics, activities which often generate high incomes compared to traditional women's work such as tailoring or soap making (Guinea)
- Provide more education and training programs for women in order to improve their skills and knowledge and increase income opportunities (Thailand)

## Right to Education

Refugee women participating in the Dialogue and the local and regional consultations highlighted the value of promoting girls' education. Teenage pregnancy, forced early marriage and the low value placed on girls' education were named as a few of the existing barriers to education for women. Investing in education improves the chances of women to become economically independent, and also increases their access to information and knowledge of their rights. In Africa, the Federation of African Women Educationalists (FAWE) is a trans-national network that works within various countries to promote primary and secondary education for girls. They have partnered with UNHCR in several countries to help support returnee girls' education. According to several participants, the UNHCR-Ted Turner Fund initiative, "100 Scholarships for Girls", in Sierra Leone has changed the lives of many returnee women and girls.<sup>15</sup>

Women's associations have a particularly important role to play in skills development, especially through teaching women new and non-traditional skills. Women learning new skills has an enormous potential for enhancing the lives of individual women and their families, as illustrated in the following story:<sup>16</sup>

*"Josephine, a physically disabled woman, was in her home when soldiers attacked her home in Sierra Leone. They led her husband to the gate and cut his throat. They took Josephine to the Federal Camp where they gang raped her several times. After two months in the camp, one Rebel Commander took her as his 'wife', from her junior captors to Yekepa in Nimba county. He left her children behind. She managed to escape. On arrival in a refugee camp in Guinea, she received medical, shelter and non-food items, as well as counselling assistance from OCPH/UNHCR. Josephine later received a scholarship as a disabled widow to learn a new skill in nursing. She did this for one and a half years and now works for ARC in Kountaya as a nurse.*

*Josephine joined the Association of Disabled People for which she now serves as a chair person and is responsible for the welfare of disabled women. Through the association she met and married a blind man. Although she hasn't managed to trace her family, Josephine says she has now decided to put her past*

<sup>15</sup> The Ted Turner Fund funded multi-sectoral projects implemented by UNHCR to prevent and respond to sexual and gender based violence in five sub-Saharan countries.

<sup>16</sup> See for example the Consultation Report from Sierra Leone.

*behind her and use her experience to help other refugees, especially disabled persons, to forge forward. Josephine is living proof that 'disability is not inability'”*

(Kountaya Camp, Guinea, 19 May 2001)

### What can be done:

- Continue awareness raising efforts and mobilization campaigns for girl-child education, focusing on overcoming cultural and traditional barriers. (West Africa)
- Provide scholarships for female students (West Africa)
- Support vocational training for girls and young women (West Africa and Zambia)
- Support adult education centres to improve literacy levels amongst women (Zambia)
- Provide separate schools for boys and girls when circumstances make it necessary (Geneva)
- Support young mothers to continue their education, for example through providing grants and child care (Geneva)

## *Land and Property Rights*

According to the participants of the Dialogue, the issue of property rights and land inheritance is critical to women and requires greater advocacy with host governments. Returnee women noted that in many situations women are unable to inherit land by law or custom. Their security is threatened by the interests of others, including relatives, vying to control their title to land. In addition, in cases where men have abandoned their families and taken on new wives, returnee women are very often left without property. In the case of Rwanda, a highly agricultural country where women constitute the majority of agricultural workers, returnee women were unable to inherit land. Thus, a large proportion of the population was dispossessed. Refugee women participants stressed the importance of land for economic independence, and questioned why governments did not extend temporary land tenure to refugee populations. They encouraged UNHCR to increase their advocacy directed at governments on this issue, and on the question of reform to property and land rights to ensure equal access for women. For example, UNHCR worked with the Government of Rwanda to pass a new inheritance law, recognizing women's rights.

### What can be done:

- Ensure equal access to women and men in the planning and management of land issues (Angola)
- Married women or those that live with men should be recognized as family heads and thus given the possibility of being co-owners of land. Title deeds to both individual and collective land should include equal co-proprietorship of women (Colombia)

*“During the consultation, it was discovered that displaced, refugee and returnee women had a great dynamism and a lot of concrete ideas on their condition as well as the immediate ways of overcoming them. They are women with a high participative capacity to act and change different situations positively. There is a great potential of women leaders that has to be encouraged and given the incentive to materialize their actions in their favour and in that of the communities in which they live”*

(Luanda, Angola, 17 May 2001)

Over the past decade, UNHCR has undertaken an impressive range of initiatives to promote gender equality in its field offices.<sup>17</sup> However, both UNHCR and refugee women participants agreed that the Policy on Refugee Women and Guidelines on the Protection of Refugee Women are not always followed.<sup>18</sup> Thus, there is a gap between policy and practice that negatively affects the protection and assistance of refugee women.

Refugee women participants highlighted four cross-cutting issues to be addressed through a partnership between UNHCR and refugee women to bridge the gaps in policy implementation. These are to: a) promote refugee women’s participation, leadership and decision-making; b) build women’s resources; c) develop long-term and integrated approaches; and, d) enhance men’s participation in promoting gender equality. The following section of the report presents some of the challenges identified by refugee women in each of these areas. It then turns to the opportunities that exist for refugee women and UNHCR to overcome these challenges and promote women’s advancement.

### ***Promote Refugee Women’s Participation, Leadership and Decision-making***

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*“Trying to change societies’ behaviour is difficult and does not come high on the agenda...It is important to ensure that women participate at all levels and in all institutions so that women’s issues are mainstreamed into all government and other institutional activities”*

(Zagreb, Croatia, May 2001)

*“Women have to be involved in decision-making processes, not just be there”*


(Kolude Doherty, UNHCR Director of the Africa Bureau, Geneva, 22 June 2001)

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<sup>17</sup> Good Practices have been identified in field offices by the office of the Senior Coordinator for Refugee Women and Gender Equality in cooperation with the Regional Advisors for Refugee Women and UNHCR field offices (See Building Partnerships for Equality: Good Practices on Gender Equality Mainstreaming, Office of the Senior Coordinator for Refugee Women, UNHCR, Geneva Switzerland, 2000, and, A Guide to Empowerment: Good Practices on Gender Equality Mainstreaming, Office of the Senior Coordinator for Refugee Women, UNHCR, Geneva Switzerland, 2001).

<sup>18</sup> As one report stated: “it was clear that the Policy, though widely distributed, had not been read and as a result the Policy had not been fully implemented in programs serving the refugee community” (Nairobi, Kenya, 7-9 June 2001).

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## Challenges

During the panel discussions with senior management on the final day of the Dialogue, Jeffery Crisp, Director of the Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit, suggested that for a variety of reasons, UNHCR staff has less and less interaction with the refugee women and men they are mandated to assist and protect. Several refugee women agreed with this observation and noted that many refugees have little knowledge of UNHCR staff or their mandate. As one refugee woman participant argued, it is often the case that, “those making the decisions are not those who are living the lives of refugees.” Janet Lim, Director of the Emergency and Security Section, expanded on the nature of the problem:

*“An important thing we have to look into is that very often when we plan our program of assistance for refugee camps, we often do it just from our own point of view. What is not systematically done is to incorporate the participation of the refugees themselves in planning programs, to include the views and assessment of refugees and the specific difficulties women face. We tend to plan our programs year after year in the same way, once a program has started we just make slight adjustments here and there and do not really review whether or not we are having the right impact...We have to look at where we need to change internally in our own UNHCR system: the way we conduct, plan and implement our activities, taking into account the feed-back you have provided us here”*

(Geneva, 22 June 2001)

Even when there are efforts to include refugees in decision-making, women are sometimes prevented from participating for several reasons. In some cases, family and childcare responsibilities preclude them from participating in activities outside the home. In others, the inferior status of women within society, cultural traditions, and their lack of experience and leadership skills means that they are unable to play a constructive role in decision-making positions.

In addition, refugees still tend to be seen by humanitarian actors as ‘recipients’ of refugee protection and assistance and not as agents of change. The idea that refugees are waiting for hand-outs reinforces a perception that UNHCR assessment, planning and implementation is something that is “done to” rather than “with” refugees. One regional consultation report explained the impact of this perception,

*“this can be very disempowering for women, who are treated as helpless victims, rather than individuals who should be adequately consulted and informed of all decisions impacting their lives.... [T]heir limited impact on decision-making is reflected both at the level of political decisions taken by governments, and at the level of decisions taken by humanitarian agencies such as UNHCR”*

(Sierra Leone, 26 May 2001)

*“Women should not be passive recipients of protection and assistance and should therefore be provided with the opportunity to participate in the identification of their needs and problems identifying solutions to them”*

(Wairimu Karago, UNHCR Africa Regional Director, Nairobi, Kenya, 7-9 June 2001)

*“We should not ask UNHCR to give us fish. We should rather ask them to show us how to catch fish, so that we can be self-reliant”*

(Augusta, a Sierra Leonean returnee woman)



Even when UNHCR consults with refugees, women representatives of refugee communities tend to be relegated to marginal roles, or women's refugee committees are given a secondary status. For example, in Than Him Camp in Thailand, women are involved in women's committees that liaise with the 'main camp' refugee committees.

“ [However, their] *status is considered lower....although the committee's members are elected by the women in the community...their power is de facto non-existent*”

(Tham Hin Camp, Thailand, 28 May 2001)

The following excerpt from the regional consultation with refugee women in Mexico further illustrates this point:

“*During refuge [in Mexico], NGOs and UNHCR worked with women, transmitting their rights. There are also NGOs in Guatemala who support women. State institutions, however, do not hold a position of respect for and promotion of women's rights. There is also injustice toward women in the legislation and the judicial system. Generally speaking, the municipal level is also insensitive toward women... [On the other hand,] In Ixcán, there is a mayor who is aware and who really takes women into account, offering a forum for their real participation*”

(Mexico City, Mexico, 22-24 April 2001)

## Opportunities

Refugee women are making a courageous effort to ensure their places around decision-making tables. In Colombia, refugee women are beginning to participate in once male-dominated Peace Committees and in Guatemala, refugee women, with the support of UNHCR were represented for the first time on the Permanent Commissions representing refugees. In addition, refugee women are successfully organizing to lobby UN agencies. For example, Sudanese refugees in Yemen successfully lobbied UNHCR to provide ration cards to female heads of household. In Jordan, refugee women more recently demanded that Palestinian refugee women who had arrived in 1948 receive their own documentation.

Changes are also evident within UNHCR itself. For example, the Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit at UNHCR has taken a number of steps to include refugee women in evaluations and to analyze the impact of projects designed to protect refugee women. To illustrate, a participatory pilot project was held which involved a significant number of refugee women.

Participants in the consultations urged UNHCR to support peace initiatives in coordination with women's associations, NGOs and other UN actors. During the Arusha Peace Process, UNHCR joined UNIFEM in supporting women's own efforts to influence the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement for Burundi. UNHCR assisted in bringing refugee women to an all-Party Women's Conference to identify specific recommendations. All but one of their recommendations were incorporated into the final Agreement.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>19</sup> For more information see *Engendering Peace: Reflections on the Burundi Peace Process, UNIFEM Nairobi, and Good Practices on Gender Equality Mainstreaming, Arusha Tanzania, UNHCR Vol II. June 2001.*



## Summary of Recommendations

Advocacy with governments, NGOs, refugee communities and male-dominated management committees is necessary, and practical ways must be found to overcome gender-related barriers to participation. For instance, childcare may be required if women are to participate in decision-making and implementation. Refugee women participants asked that awareness raising campaigns and training on refugee women's rights be continued. Involving both women and men in awareness campaigns – both as advocates and as targets – was considered an essential measure. A number of regional reports suggested establishing 'spaces' within UNHCR field offices where staff, NGOs, government actors and refugee women could meet on a regular basis. Finally, according to participants, refugee women leaders should be supported, and should be encouraged to act as role models to other women.

## *Build Women's Resources*

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“We the women are the victims of circumstance. We are the important resources too”

(Jackie, Liberian refugee woman in Sierra Leone, 22 June 2001)

“Refugee women obviously know what the solutions are. They are asking for the means to move forward”

(Janet Lim, Director of Emergency and Security Service, UNHCR, Geneva, 22 June 2001)

## Challenges

Refugee men, as the majority of community leaders and refugee committee representatives, are more likely than women to be recognized by international humanitarian workers as agents of change within their communities. As a result, women's organizations and network activities are not always recognized as important resources for bringing about change. Some UNHCR staff still considers that gender equality initiatives fall outside of the organization's mandate. For instance, women's empowerment projects and support to refugee women's associations – an integral component of women's empowerment and gender equality mainstreaming – are sometimes regarded as a 'politically correct' activity, rather than a vital component of all UNHCR activities. Yet refugee women's associations and networks are an important resource to UNHCR as well. They must be recognized as such:

“We have the energy to do the work, but we lack the capacity and need your support. Help us to help you”

(Refugee woman participant, Geneva, 22 June 2001)

## Opportunities

“An accomplishment of this conference is networking with you, through you and by you”

(Søren Jessen-Petersen, UNHCR Assistant High Commissioner, Geneva, 22 June 2001)

Participants convincingly illustrated that strengthening local organizations and local, regional and international networking promotes women's participation, leadership, and the realization of women's rights. Women have spontaneously formed associations within refugee, internally displaced, returnee and resettlement countries to



cope with and combat the difficulties they encounter. For example, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, associations of women were formed to help women deal with the trauma endured during the war. Today, this work continues with male ex-combatants to deal with post-traumatic stress, which in turn alleviates levels of violence in the home. In Kazakhstan, a women's association deals with legal rights of refugees and assists in drafting laws to protect them. Faced with a different situation, Canadian resettled women have formed networks of support to assist newly arriving asylum-seekers and resettled refugees to cope with the transition to their new country.

Networks of women in the Caucasus have fostered the beginning of a reconciliation process by co-educating children of different ethnic backgrounds. In Georgia, a women's association was formed in order to promote peace and reconciliation.<sup>20</sup> One project brings together women from different ethnic backgrounds that have lost their children due to war. The project searches for lost children and acts as a source of support and hope for its members. For this group of women who have generally lost faith in the government and the international community, the network is their only source of support, illustrating that *“women can do something for women that no one else can”* (Refugee woman participant, Geneva, June 2001).

## Summary of Recommendations

UNHCR can support women's associations and networks by acting as a coordinator between different groups and providing support to nascent women's networks. By recognizing their importance, UNHCR can help build the associations' credibility and legitimacy in the community and can raise the profile of refugee women as equal partners.

## Develop Long-Term, Integrated Approaches

“...Gender work is long term and requires sustained follow-up and attention”

(Mexico City, 22-24 April 2001)

## Challenges

Women's empowerment and achieving gender equality require long-term processes, yet UNHCR's approach to refugee assistance is often short-term and relief-oriented. The decision to focus on immediate needs is frequently due to lack of resources and time constraints limiting participatory approaches.<sup>21</sup> The lack of long-term approaches is exacerbated by the planning cycle, where initiatives depend on program funding from year to year. Yet refugee women participants made it clear that long-term commitments to gender equality must be made:

“UNHCR needs to invest in initiatives not merely addressing...women's short-term needs, but rather those that have a potential to facilitate women's empowerment in the long-term”

(Sierra Leone, 26 May 2001)

Janet Lim, Director of Emergency and Security Service, UNHCR, argued that an integrated approach was necessary to move forward on refugee protection activities such as responding to sexual and gender based violence. Refugee women likewise argued that integrated long-term approaches are needed to address women's empowerment and

<sup>20</sup> As Georgia was neutral in the Causasus conflict, it was thought to be appropriate to start a women's association in that country for women in Armenia and Azerbaijan.

<sup>21</sup> Identified in the morning plenary 22 June 2001, as well as in an EPAU session titled “Why do we know so little about refugees (and what can we do to learn more)?” UNHCR, June 2001.

protection concerns. They argued that all actors must adopt a coordinated, cross-sectoral approach to permit effective engagement in the process of empowering women.

## Opportunities

Numerous examples of a long term and integrated approach exist in the work of women's grass-roots associations and networks. For example, the Women's Clinic of Hope in South Africa provides a range of psychological and health services, combined with income generation activities and skills training. Similarly, the volunteer group 'Nada' in Croatia, provides educational opportunities to returnees, and strives to contribute to the process of reconciliation, democratization and economic growth. Likewise, the Rwandan Polyclinic of Hope takes a gradual approach to rebuilding communities, involving women from different ethnic backgrounds in health, social, and healing processes that eventually lead to economic empowerment and the reconstruction of communities.

UNHCR has implemented three major initiatives, the Bosnia, Rwanda and Kosovo Women's Initiatives, that bring UNHCR, international NGOs and local women's associations and networks together in partnership to empower refugee and returnee women and girls in post-conflict countries. For example, the Kosovo Women's Initiative (KWI), launched in 1999, engages women from diverse ethnic backgrounds in projects such as psychological and social support, clinic based and community reproductive health education, prevention of sexual and gender based violence, income generation, micro-credit, skills training and legal assistance. Further, most participants emphasized the importance of the capacity building of women's associations, and urged UNHCR to initiate and continue training and support activities in the field.

## Summary of Recommendations

Within both headquarters and field offices, and across all departments and units, senior managers must begin to coordinate their efforts to develop gender sensitive participatory approaches. In addition, adopting new partnerships with NGOs, governments, UN agencies, and refugees is essential to promoting gender equitable solutions.

## *Enhance Men's Participation*

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### Challenges

“Men say gender is none of their affair, that it is an issue for women only”

(Mexico City, Mexico. 22-24 April 2001).

Many UNHCR, NGO staff and refugees associate promoting gender equality solely with women. However, this should not mean focusing on women to the exclusion of men. Refugee women repeatedly stated that more must be done to solicit men's participation in the promotion of gender equality. The importance of promoting men's participation is perhaps most evident in instances of SGBV and domestic violence, where men constitute the majority of perpetrators. Among other activities to prevent SGBV and domestic violence, awareness raising campaigns and sensitivity or rights training must be carried out not only with women, but also with policemen, male judges, and other men within the community. This training can have a positive effect on the whole family.



*“A male member of their household always has the final say. The women quoted their educated men as saying, ‘You are at home. You know nothing. You should stay out of decision-making. I am educated. You are not’. They said that uneducated men say, ‘If you go out, I am dishonoured – I should wear burqa’”*

(Peshawar Pakistan, 10 May 2001)

## Opportunities

*“The promotion of women’s rights is everybody’s job”*

(Louise Lavigne, Counsellor, Permanent Mission of Canada, Geneva, 22 June 2001)

A number of women’s health and psycho-social organizations have begun to offer assistance and counselling to men traumatized by conflict. In the Americas, training programs to address the issue of machismo have been developed and are aimed at men. In the consultations in West Africa, women reported that a small number of refugee and returnee men have begun to advocate for women’s rights and the prevention of violence against women. In a number of the local and regional consultations, the issue of men’s participation was highlighted, a sign that this is recognized as an important new area of work.

## Summary of Recommendations

Awareness raising campaigns should help men to understand the importance of involving refugee women in leadership positions, respecting and promoting their rights and supporting women in the home to enable their participation in the public sphere.

*“The strengthening of the potential of women to enable them to fully participate in the decision-making processes of their communities is not accepted by men who are used to the women remaining in a traditional place. The displaced, refugee and returnee populations need information and sensitisation on gender equality issues with full participation of the men in order to help them come into terms with the role of their spouses so as to see them as partners and not enemies. Institutions need to mainstream this aspect in their objectives, assistance and development programmes”*

(Luanda, Angola, 17 May 2001)



The Dialogue with Refugee Women succeeded in giving refugee women a voice, and provided the means for this voice to be heard by UNHCR's senior managers, staff, and implementing partners. The refugee women who participated in this process were the representatives of the many millions other women around the world who have also been forced into a life of displacement. During the Dialogue the women shared their experiences of the past and their visions for the future with each other and with UNHCR. This process was the beginning of a new partnership as it forged new links between refugee women themselves, and between the women, UNHCR and other implementing partners.

In response to the recommendations put forth by the refugee women, UNHCR senior managers responded with five key commitments. These commitments will serve as the initial stage of UNHCR's new strategy for advancing the rights of refugee women and mainstreaming gender equality.

**1. Develop integrated country-level strategies to address violence against refugee women, including in situations of domestic violence.**

Recognising that sexual and gender based violence continues to be a severe impediment to the advancement of women and the enjoyment of their rights, UNHCR commits to developing integrated country-level strategies to address violence against women, including domestic violence. These strategies will be developed in coordination with security, legal, programme, community services and health sectors. In addition, partnerships will be developed with NGOs, governments, implementing partners and refugee communities to make these strategies more enduring. HIV/AIDS prevention and response will also be included as part of this comprehensive system.

**2. Refugee women will be registered individually and delivered relevant documentation to ensure their individual security, freedom of movement and access to essential services. Refugee women and men will be enabled to participate equally in the registration process.**

Refugee women should be individually registered to ensure that they do not depend on male heads of households for food and essential assistance items, which often increases the protection problems that women face. UNHCR will ensure that new registration systems, guidelines and procedures are protection-centred and protect women's access to livelihoods. Lack of personal documentation for women seriously increases security risks for refugee women when moving about in their country of asylum. UNHCR will make it an absolute priority to work with government authorities at all levels to ensure that the standards set out in UNHCR's Executive Committee Conclusions regarding individual registration and documentation of refugees on their territories are respected.

**3. In all management committees and other mechanisms of representation of refugees to UNHCR in urban, rural and camp settings, including return areas, 50% of representatives will be women.**

It is crucial that refugee women participate more fully and more actively in decision-making processes. UNHCR commits all its field offices to work towards a target that 50% of representatives on urban and rural/camp management committees be women over the next year. This will also involve a commitment to ensure that women are given the skills, resources, and support that are necessary for them to become active participants. Training and capacity-building will be important elements in this process.

- 4. Refugee women's direct and indirect participation in the management of distribution processes for food and non-food items will ensure, to the extent possible, that these are distributed and controlled directly by adult female household members.**

Determining the nature of refugee women's involvement in distribution processes requires consultation with refugee women and men. This will involve a careful evaluation of the responsibilities of refugee women, and an assessment of their needs. This process should be an integral part of the design and operation of assistance distribution systems.

- 5. The provision of sanitary materials to all women and girls of concern should become a standardised practice in UNHCR assistance programs.**

A recent survey conducted by UNHCR found that very few offices have been supplying these essential materials to refugee women and girls, and among those that do, there are considerable differences in terms of quantity, quality of materials, and method and frequency of distribution. This lack of provision has a detrimental effect on women and girls in all spheres of their lives from health, education, and community involvement to employment. UNHCR is requiring that all offices be responsible for ensuring that the provision of appropriate sanitary supplies is included as a priority in country operational budgets for 2002, and when revising current projects, additional costs should be met through budgetary reallocations.



# Annex A.

## List of National and Regional Consultations

Location	Date	Refugee Women	NGO Participants	UNHCR Staff
Almaty, Kazakhstan	18 May 2001	9		2
Almaty, Kazakhstan*	22-23 May 2001	4	7	5
Amman, Jordan	10 May 2001	20		
Azerbaijan	17 May 2001	9	4	2
Beirut, Lebanon	8 May 2001			
Belarus	7 June 2001	32	4	2
Belgrade, FRY	11 June 2001	18	3	3
Bogota, Colombia	16-18 May 2001	23		3
Cairo, Egypt*	16-17 May 2001	25	7	6
Damascus, Syria	13 May 2001	22	7	5
Freetown, Sierra Leone	26 May 2001	22	11	9
Kiev, Ukraine	23-24 May 2001	13	8	6
Kountaya Camp, Guinea	19 May 2001	~35		6
Luanda, Angola	18 May 2001	44	2	2
Mae La Camp, Thailand	1 June 2001	10	4	1
Mexico City, Mexico*	22-24 April 2001	19	4	7
Moldova	17 May 2001	31	7	4
Montreal, Canada	3 May 2001			
Moscow, Russian Federation	23-24 May 2001	6	9	8
Mwange Camp, Zambia	1-4 June 2001	28	1	3
Nairobi, Kenya*	7-9 June 2001	44	14	9
Osire Camp, Namibia	12 May 2001	35	1	1
Peshawar, Pakistan	10 May 2001			
Sarajevo, Bosnia Herzegovina	6 June 2001			
Sisak, Croatia	May 2001	9	4	7
Tbilisi, Georgia	22 May 2001	13	8	6
Tbilisi, Georgia*	29-30 May 2001	11	5	10
Tham Hin Camp, Thailand	28 May 2001	8	1	1
Tindouf Camps, Algeria	27-29 May 2001	26	2	5
Turkmenistan	17 May 2001	7	1	5
Yerevan, Armenia	17-18 May 2001	15	5	2
Zagreb, Croatia	May 2001			

\* Regional Consultations

# Participants of the Dialogue with Refugee **Women**

## Refugee Women Participants

### *Maria Socorro Abril Cediel*

Nationality: Colombian  
Country of Residence: Colombia

### *Deigo Aden Mohamed*

Nationality: Somalian  
Country of Residence: Russian  
Federation

### *Maria Teresa Aguilar*

Nationality: Guatemalan  
Country of Residence: Guatemala

### *Jima Nesredin Ahmedin*

Nationality: Ethiopian  
Country of Residence: Kenya

### *Muysar Al-Sadi*

Nationality: Palestinian  
Country of Residence: Jordan

### *Sao Barrie*

Nationality: Sierra Leonean  
Country of Residence: Guinea

### *Dijana Besic*

Nationality: Bosniak  
Country of Residence: Croatia

### *Calina Bonaventure*

Nationality: Burundian  
Country of Residence: Kenya

### *Anatilde Mariana Capitango*

Nationality: Angolan  
Country of Residence: Angola

### *Sadani Chej Salama*

Nationality: Saharan  
Country of Residence: Cuba

### *Adriana Paulo de Jesus*

Nationality: Angolan  
Country of Residence: Namibia

### *Grace Dunbar*

Nationality: Liberian  
Country of Residence: USA

### *Aicha Garba*

Nationality: Togolese  
Country of Residence: USA

### *Nujin-Aynur Gunes*

Nationality: Kurdish  
Country of Residence: Switzerland

### *Partawmina Hashemee*

Nationality: Afghan  
Country of Residence: Pakistan

### *Muraya Salat Ibrahim*

Nationality: Somalian  
Country of Residence: Kenya

### *Esther Isaac*

Nationality: Sierra Leonean  
Country of Residence: Guinea

### *Marine Janoyan*

Nationality: Armenian  
Country of Residence: Armenia

### *Malika Kadieva*

Nationality: Russian/Chechnyan  
Country of Residence: Kazakhstan

### *Salvedina Karahodzic*

Nationality: Bosniak  
Country of Residence: Bosnia

### *Marion F. Kargbo*

Nationality: Sierra Leone  
Country of Residence: Sierra Leone

### *Julia Karashvili*

Nationality: Georgian/Abkhasi  
Country of Residence: Georgia

### *Danijela Korac*

Nationality: Montenegrin  
Country of Residence: FRY

### *Augusta Isatu Koroma*

Nationality: Sierra Leone  
Country of Residence: Sierra Leone

### *Fereshteh Madjizadeh*

Nationality: Iranian  
Country of Residence: Switzerland

### *Nagwa Mazoub Mohamed*

Nationality: Sudanese  
Country of Residence: Egypt

### *Kajani Malayandi*

Nationality: Sri Lankan  
Country of Residence: Switzerland

### *Henriette Mangala*

Nationality: Congolese  
Country of Residence: Zambia

### *Jackie Marshall*

Nationality: Liberian  
Country of Residence: Sierra Leone

### *Maria Isabel Mazo Duarte*

Nationality: Colombia  
Country of Residence: Mexico

### *Marie Morris*

Nationality: Liberian  
Country of Residence: Guinea

### *Immaculee Murakatete*

Nationality: Rwandan  
Country of Residence: South Africa

### *Win Myint Than*

Nationality: Burmese  
Country of Residence: Thailand



***Xuan Nguyen Suttr***

Nationality: Vietnamese  
Country of Residence: USA

***Venancia Niragira***

Nationality: Burundian  
Country of Residence: Tanzania

***Nora Omoya***

Nationality: Sudanese  
Country of Residence: Kenya

***Eva Osorio Nieto***

Nationality: Cuban  
Country of Residence: Canada

***Frishta Paiman***

Nationality: Afghan  
Country of Residence: Pakistan

***Sela Anjuluni Chabumbwa***

Nationality: Congolese  
Country of Residence: Tanzania

***Yasmin Sheikh***

Nationality: Somali  
Country of Residence: Yemen

***Natela Shekikhacheva***

Nationality: Russian  
Country of Residence: Russia

***Mama Sidi Abdelahadi***

Nationality: Saharan  
Country of Residence: Algeria

***Blanca Oliva Soto Jojoa***

Nationality: Colombian  
Country of Residence: Colombia

***Elfineish Tagai Mulato***

Nationality: Somali  
Country of Residence: Egypt

***Saadat Tolibova***

Nationality: Tajik  
Country of Residence: Tajikistan

***Rigiya Usmanova***

Nationality: Meskhetian Turk  
Country of Residence: Azerbaijan

***Anda Valla***

Nationality: Kosovar  
Country of Residence: Kosovo

***Hiba Yousif***

Nationality: Iraqi  
Country of Residence: Belgium

**NGO Participants**

***Saida Ali***

CARE Kenya

***Mary Diaz***

Executive Director  
Women's Commission for Refugee  
Women and Children

***Elizabeth Ferris***

Executive Secretary,  
World Council of Churches

***Winnie Guchu***

Representative  
FIDA-Kenya

***Musimbi Kanyoro***

Executive Director  
YWCA

***Boogie Khutsoane***

Executive Director  
WiLDAF

***Ruth Niyonzima***

Community Services Officer  
CARE-Tanzania

***Elvira Vatlina***

Children's Fund of Kazakhstan

**UNHCR Participants**

***Ruud Lubbers***

UN High Commissioner for  
Refugees

***Soren Jessen-Petersen***

Assistant High-Commissioner,  
UNHCR

***Erika Feller***

Director  
Division of International Protection

***Kolude Doherty***

Director  
Africa Bureau

***Janet Lim***

Director  
Emergency and Security Service

***Jeffery Crisp***

Director  
Evaluation and Policy Analysis  
Unit

***Joyce Mends-Cole***

Senior Co-ordinator for Refugee  
Women and Gender Equality  
Division of Operational Support

***Chansa Kapaya***

Senior Regional Advisor, Refugee  
Women and Gender Equality  
Nairobi, Kenya



**Sawsan Khalifa**

Senior Regional Advisor, Refugee Women and Gender Equality  
Damascus, Syria

**Andres Ramirez**

Senior Regional Advisor, Refugee Women and Gender Equality  
San Jose, Costa Rica

**Nemia Temporal**

Senior Regional Advisor, Refugee Women and Gender Equality  
Ankara, Turkey

**Diane Goodman**

Training Officer  
Protection Support and Oversight Section

**Terry Morel**

Senior Training Officer  
Staff Development Section

**Henrik Nordentoft**

Senior Change Management Officer  
Division of Operational Support

**Walpurga Englbrecht**

Research Officer of International Protection Department

**Brigitte Ebbesen**

Community Services Officer  
Division of Operational Support

**Katharina Samara**

Program Officer, Refugee Women and Gender Equality Unit  
Division of Operational Support

**Fanny Benedetti**

Refugee Women and Gender Equality Unit  
Division of Operational Support

**Esmeralda Francisco**

Refugee Women and Gender Equality Unit  
Division of Operational Support

**Karen Barnes**

Refugee Women and Gender Equality Unit  
Division of Operational Support

**Leyla Terzian**

Administrative Assistant, Refugee Women and Gender Equality Unit  
Division of Operational Support

## Donor Country Participants

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**Haiko Alfeld**

First Secretary  
South African Permanent Mission

**Mikael Barfod**

Head of ECHO 4 Policy Unit and Head of Delegation  
European Commission

**Cecilia Bjorner**

Counsellor  
Swedish Permanent Mission

**Joanne Caley**

First Secretary  
British Permanent Mission

**Astrid Helle Ajamay**

First Secretary  
Norwegian Permanent Mission

**Hajime Kishimori**

Second Secretary  
Japanese Permanent Mission

**Louise Lavigne**

Counsellor  
Canadian Permanent Mission

**Betsy Lippman**

Program Officer  
US Department of State

**Ciara O'Brien**

First Secretary Humanitarian Affairs  
Irish Permanent Mission

**Hanne Raatikainen**

Second Secretary  
Finish Permanent Mission

**Anne Marie Sloth-Carlsen**

Minister Counsellor  
Danish Permanent Mission

## Other Participants

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Natasha Alexandrovich  
Erin Baines  
Marta Bekele  
Deborah Cocorulla  
Mariette Grange  
Ghada Haddad  
Caroline Hempstead  
Shaden Khallaf  
Evelyn Mandela  
Chilemwa Nllowane  
Hellen Schrooyen

# Summary Of Discussions: Safety and Security

## Safety And Security: Summary Of Key Issues

- Sexual and gender based violence (armed conflict, domestic violence, prostitution, trauma)
- Quality of asylum (gender-sensitive RSD, detention, access to procedures)
- Legal status in asylum (documentation, registration, legal status, freedom of movement)
- Camp design and layout (safety of women, decision-making committees, resource control)
- Durable solutions (role in decision-making, education / training)
- Women in reconciliation and peacebuilding (informal and formal participation)

## Safety And Security: Summary Of Key Issues

GROUP 1 <i>Displacement &amp; Exile in Rural/Camp Setting</i>	GROUP 2 <i>Displacement &amp; Exile in Urban Settings</i>	GROUP 3 <i>Return and Reintegration</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women not represented on management committees</li> <li>• Women lack individual documentation and registration leading to serious protection risks</li> <li>• Women have little control over money and/or material resources</li> <li>• Camp layout and design compromises protection of women, SGBV very prevalent</li> <li>• Stigma and lack of prosecution prevents women speaking out about SGBV</li> <li>• Restrictions on freedom of movement prevent women from accessing markets and support networks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women not represented on management committees</li> <li>• Violence and trauma from war/flight results in SGBV (esp. domestic violence)</li> <li>• Men are rarely prosecuted and women are ashamed to discuss SGBV</li> <li>• No access to education</li> <li>• No freedom of movement or legal status for women</li> <li>• Lack of support system for women in urban environment</li> <li>• Police and judicial system reluctant to become involved in cases of domestic violence</li> <li>• Women often placed in detention pending RSD process</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women not represented on management committees</li> <li>• Culture of violence contributes to continued SGBV after return</li> <li>• Failure of judicial systems to protect women's rights</li> <li>• No work permits forcing women to work illegally, increasing abuse and SGBV</li> <li>• Lengthy and non-gender sensitive RSD process (usually only done through man)</li> <li>• War prevents return of refugees (security problems)</li> <li>• Skills/qualifications gained in refuge are not recognised on return</li> <li>• Women not involved on decision-making on return</li> <li>• Lack of facilities and no support system in place when women return</li> </ul>

## Current Activities

- |  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relocation of camps away from insecure locations and border regions</li> <li>• Provision of ration cards to women heads of households</li> <li>• When women are on decision-making bodies they can push for improved location and design</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Psychological assistance and advice</li> <li>• Practical training and education services</li> <li>• Legal representation</li> <li>• Sensitisation on SGBV involving men and adolescents</li> <li>• Phone-lines and hot-lines for trauma victims</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women's organisations working to address culture of violence, especially with youth and men</li> <li>• Income-generating and social activities to facilitate reintegration</li> <li>• Attempts to engage local and refugee populations together</li> </ul> |
|--|---|---|

## Gaps In Programs

- |  |  |   |
|--|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women are often registered under the male family members</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Laws to protect women are rarely implemented</li> <li>• Few programs to protect women from prostitution,</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of awareness amongst local population about SGBV</li> </ul> |
|--|--|---|

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ration cards and control of food and other resources given to men</li> <li>• Women not represented on camp management committees</li> <li>• SGBV issues often do not influence camp layout and design</li> <li>• Documentation and registration process too lengthy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• exploitation, and other forms of violence</li> <li>• Men's trauma needs are not targeted and addressed</li> <li>• Governments can block return of refugees</li> <li>• Counselling for violence and trauma rarely included in medical services given to refugees</li> <li>• Urban refugees assumed to be self-sufficient and are given little assistance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grassroots women are not involved in decision-making bodies</li> <li>• Women are not involved in planning, decision-making or implementation of programs</li> </ul>
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### What Women And Their Communities Can Do

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sensitisation and education of population about issues of SGBV and the rights of women with the goal of addressing legal and cultural barriers to women's empowerment</li> <li>• Lobby for the inclusion of women counsellors/staff in refugee camps and organisations and in food distribution networks</li> <li>• Create networks of women to discuss and address sources of conflict and to promote reconciliation</li> <li>• Expand local income-generating and capacity-building programs for women</li> <li>• Provide legal advice, training and awareness-raising to refugee women</li> <li>• Exchange experiences with UNHCR staff to increase awareness and understanding</li> <li>• Arrange visits to women being held in detention in countries of asylum</li> <li>• Mobilise women at the grassroots level to become involved in decision-making and political participation</li> <li>• Sensitise communities and leaders about peaceful conflict resolution</li> <li>• Launch information campaigns about refugees to reduce xenophobia and stigmatisation</li> </ul>
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### What Support Is Needed From UNHCR

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage and lobby for the equal and independent documentation of women</li> <li>• Monitor and lobby for the reduction of lengthy time period for RSD and asylum processes</li> <li>• Advocate for safe camp locations and temporary refugee ownership of land</li> <li>• Capacity-building of women both in countries of asylum and in home countries</li> <li>• Consider other durable solutions aside from return</li> <li>• Sensitisation and training of immigration officials, police and security forces and field staff</li> <li>• Establish safe-houses for women and centres dealing with traumatised men and women</li> <li>• Advocate for recognition of diplomas/certificates obtained in exile and for refugee travel documents</li> <li>• Assist with job-creation and income-generating schemes, especially in camps and upon return to home countries</li> <li>• Mutual guarantees on security of returning refugees, and ensure protection of human rights in return zones</li> <li>• Ensure participation of women in all formal peace processes and negotiations</li> <li>• Ensure that return only occurs on an individual, voluntary basis</li> <li>• Give ration cards to women to ensure more equal and efficient distribution of resources</li> <li>• Work with host governments to find alternatives to detention and detainment, encourage adoption of 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol</li> <li>• Improve provision of health services, especially for trauma and AIDS victims</li> <li>• Support cross-border dialogue and exchange of best practices for peace and reconciliation</li> </ul>
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# Summary Of Discussions: Livelihoods

## Livelihoods: Summary Of Key Issues

- Basic needs (food, clean water, shelter)
- Health issues (reproductive health, access to female medical staff, psychosocial services)
- Employment (right to employment, non-traditional and vocational training, independence of income)
- Education (equal access for girls, language training, scholarships, non-formal education, illiteracy)
- Land and property issues (land property rights on return, right to inherit)

## Issues / Barriers

### GROUP 1

#### *Displacement & Exile in Rural/Camp Setting*

- Domestic obligations and cultural/social norms prevent girls from going to school
- Early pregnancy, forced marriage, and lack of clothes and other materials limit school attendance
- Lack of education, illiteracy, language barriers, no job market restrict employment opportunities
- Food shortages in camps
- Inefficient distribution (women not involved)
- Healthcare services often inadequate and inaccessible
- Few women doctors

### GROUP 2

#### *Displacement & Exile in Urban Settings*

- Quality and quantity of food provided in urban areas is poor, distribution is inefficient
- Cultural context of food provision not considered
- Locally-produced foodstuffs are not used
- Women not involved in the distribution of food
- Women cannot work and therefore have no income to become independent
- Inappropriate and inadequate shelter situation
- Limited access to job markets

### GROUP 3

#### *Return and Reintegration*

- Lack of proper shelter or resources to build new infrastructure
- Poor job market, many jobs inaccessible due to language and skill requirements
- Black market leads women to turn to prostitution
- Patriarchal society prevents land inheritance
- Lack of basic medical information
- Lack of healthcare and other services upon return

## Current Activities

- Provision of sanitary materials, uniforms and bags to encourage girls to attend school
- Skills training by refugee groups
- Income-generation and micro-credit projects
- Food ration cards given to female heads of households

- Women networking and organising to provide training and information-sharing about education and employment opportunities within communities

- Campaigning by women for rights to inherit land from husband/father and for women's land rights
- Seminars and workshops to educate women

## Gaps In Programs

- Influence policies through advocating, sensitisation, awareness-raising
- Limited funding
- Women not involved in decision-making
- Lack of registration of women means they have no access to basic supplies

- Women not involved in decision-making process of food distribution
- Food distribution is not localised which means food is often inappropriate, out-of-date and sometimes does not reach refugees
- Shelter is usually over-crowded and located in dangerous areas
- It is not recognised by UNHCR that urban women are unable to become self-sufficient

- No co-ordination amongst NGOs, HCR and governments about service and basic need provision
- Lack of basic services support for refugees upon return, especially healthcare and education
- Women often lack skills and training necessary to compete in the economy once returned

## What Women And Their Communities Can Do

- Sensitise communities and families about the importance of education for girls
- Reduce girls' domestic chores and provide day-care to enable them to go to school
- Influence employment/training policies through advocating, sensitisation, and awareness-raising
- Vocational and skills-training, micro-credit initiatives, co-operatives, community support for small initiatives
- Education campaigns, workshops, training in healthcare provision and sensitisation about women's health needs and rights
- Organise and network to share issues, concerns, knowledge and resources for employment and education of refugee women
- Mobilise to pressure governments to extend land rights and inheritance rights to women
- Encourage women to take up non-traditional jobs and training

## What Support Is Needed From UNHCR

- Increase support for educational programs and awareness about the importance of schooling
- Training of teachers, language trainers and provision of resources needed for schools
- Support leadership training of women
- Design training programs according to market needs, increase access of women's goods to markets
- Should define and require a minimum set of conditions for women who are living in refugee shelters in order to address problems of exploitation and SGBV
- Support healthcare workshops and training, encourage reproductive health awareness
- Increase resources for training and community-based initiatives
- Support women to negotiate with and pressure governments for women's land rights
- Give women documentation and ration cards to ensure their basic needs (and the family's) are met
- Lobby governments to give refugees work permits to increase self-sufficiency
- Lobby for the temporary allocation of land to refugees to farm to increase food self-sufficiency
- Must ensure that food is not distributed through the military or governments





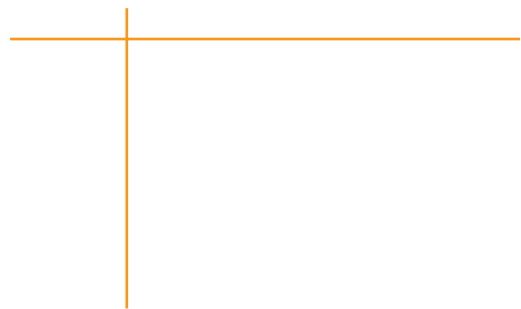


Written by Erin K. Baines, PhD

Prepared and assembled by the Senior Co-ordinator for Refugee Women and Gender Equality Unit.

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Senior Co-ordinator for Refugee Women and Gender Equality Unit

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United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees  
Case postale 2500 - CH-1211 Geneva 2 Dépôt

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